

succeed, because the need to succeed is so huge.

British Armed Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan

Q. Prime Minister, just a brief supplementary—sorry, I didn't get to ask you the question. You promised some time—I'm sorry.

President Bush. Look, I agree; this is a total violation of—[*laughter*]. Our press corps is calling you down, man. I mean, there you are—no, go ahead. [*Laughter*]

Q. You're encouraging it.

President Bush. I'm not encouraging it. He's not a member of the American press—it's the Prime Minister. [*Laughter*]

Q. He's my guy. [*Laughter*]

Q. Only because you cut me off, Mr. President—

President Bush. Okay. [*Laughter*]

Press. Ohhhhh! [*Laughter*]

Q. Prime Minister, you promised the British military whatever it takes to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the former head of the British Army says the British military is not being funded properly for the job it's being asked to do. Do you accept that?

Prime Minister Blair. We get from our military advice as to what they need, and we do our level best to meet it. I mean, we'll—I haven't actually read Mike Jackson's comments. I think it's Mike's speech you're talking about. And let me tell you, he's someone I have enormous amount of respect for and did a fantastic job when he was chief of our staff.

But in relation to this, we've worked closely with the military the whole time. It's important we carry on doing it. And I simply make the point that in the last few years, and not least yesterday in the pre-budget report of the chancellor, we gave another significant increase in funding. But it's important we do this. I mean this is a mission in which it is—because it's important that we succeed, it's important that we equip our armed forces properly. But I've got nothing—if you'll forgive me, I've not got anything to comment on in detail until I've actually read the speech that he made. Not that—I'm not saying you wouldn't give me a fair resume of it. [*Laughter*]

President Bush. Thank you, buddy.

Prime Minister Blair. Okay.

President Bush. Good job. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:05 a.m. in Room 450 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq; Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim, chairman, Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution of Iraq; Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon; President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan; President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; Cpl. Gilad Shalit, Israel Defense Forces, who was captured during a terrorist attack in Israel on June 25; and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel. Prime Minister Blair referred to former Chief of the General Staff Michael Jackson of the United Kingdom.

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree

December 7, 2006

Thank you all very much. Laura and I are pleased to welcome you to the Christmas Pageant of Peace. Christmas is a season of glad tidings and a time when our thoughts turn to the source of joy and hope born in a humble manger 2000 years ago. And tonight we gather to observe one of the great traditions of our Nation's Capital, the lighting of the National Christmas Tree.

I'm really glad Santa made it. [*Laughter*] I'm glad he could find a place to park. [*Laughter*] And I'm glad you all joined us tonight.

I want to thank Vin for his leadership of the National Park Foundation. I thank Deputy Secretary of the Interior Lynn Scarlett for joining us. I am pleased to be here with members of my Cabinet; Members of the Congress; Mary Bomar, who is the Director of the National Park Service; Joe Lawler, Regional Director of the National Capital Region, National Park Service. I want to thank all the National Park Service employees for their hard work.

I appreciate Dr. Robert Schuller for leading the invocation. I want to thank our fabulous entertainers for entertaining us tonight.

We have gathered for this ceremony for more than 80 years. We come together to

celebrate a simple and inspiring story. It's a story of a miraculous birth in a humble place. It is a story of a single life that changed the world and continues to change hearts. And for two millennia, this story has carried the message that God is with us and He offers His love to every man, woman, and child.

During the Christmas season, we seek to reflect that love in our lives. Millions of Americans will celebrate at home in fellowship with friends and family. Millions will reach out with a compassionate hand to help brothers and sisters in need. And all will give thanks to the bonds of love and affection that bring fulfillment to our lives and the hope of peace around the world.

At this time of year, we give thanks for the brave men and women in uniform who are serving our Nation. Many of those who have answered the call of duty will spend this Christmas season far from home and separated from family. We honor their sacrifice. We are proud of their service and that of their families. We will keep them close to our hearts and in our prayers.

And now, as an expression of our own hope for peace in this Christmas season, we will light the National Tree. We've asked three representatives from the National Park Service's Junior Ranger Program to help. The Junior Ranger Program teaches children and families about science, nature, and stewardship of our national parks.

And so, Attiyah Jenkins, Stephen Scott, and Dana Bederson will help me light the National Christmas Tree.

Come on up, guys.

I ask all of you to join us in the count-down—five, four, three, two, one.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:55 p.m. on the Ellipse at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Vin Cipolla, president and chief executive officer, National Park Foundation; and Robert H. Schuller, minister, Reformed Church in America.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Congressional Leaders

December 8, 2006

I want to thank the Members of Congress—both Houses, both political parties—

for joining me and the Vice President and members of my team. We just had a very constructive conversation. We talked about Iraq. We talked about the need for a new way forward in Iraq, and we talked about the need to work together on this important subject. We also talked about other key issues.

I assured the leaders that the White House door will be open when the new Congress shows up. And I think we ought to meet on a regular basis; I believe there's consensus toward that. And the reason you meet on a regular basis is so that the American people can know that we're working hard to find common ground. That's what they expect us to do; they expect us to work on big problems and solve them.

I want to say something about my two friends here. Senator Frist, we appreciate your service to the United States of America. You brought a lot of dignity to the office. And I appreciate the Speaker being, as well—Mr. Speaker, you've done a fine job as Speaker.

I look forward to working with Senator Reid and Congresswoman Pelosi for doing what's right for the country. And again, I want to thank you all for coming down. I appreciate your interest, appreciate your advice, appreciate the input that you've given.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:16 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa

December 8, 2006

President Bush. It's been my honor to welcome a man for whom I have a great deal of respect, and that is the President of South Africa, President Mbeki, here back to the Oval Office. I so very much appreciate the time you've given and the great discussion we just had.

We talked about a wide range of subjects. We talked about Darfur and the need for South Africa and the United States and other nations to work with the Sudanese Government to enable a peacekeeping force into that country to facilitate aid and save lives.